DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 429 100 TM 029 638

AUTHOR Parkin, Kay; Gaa, John; Swank, Paul; Liberman, Dov
TITLE Psychosocial Development and Self-Actualization across Age Groups: Middle-Aged and Senior Adults Compared Developmentally.
PUB DATE 1998-04-00
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Diego, CA, April 13-17, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Age Differences; Background; Individual Development; *Life Events; *Middle Aged Adults; *Older Adults; Role of Education; *Self Actualization
IDENTIFIERS *Psychosocial Development

ABSTRACT

The research question examined was whether significant differences in psychosocial development and self-actualization exist between adult cohort groups whose childhood development occurred under very different social, economic, and technological circumstances. Subjects were 113 white middle-aged and elderly adults from similar socioeconomic settings. Subjects completed the Measures of Psychosocial Development (MPD) (G. Hawley, 1988) and the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) (E. Shostrom, 1966), a measure of self-actualization. The only generational difference found for the MPD results was for industry versus inferiority, and this was confounded by education. The lack of generational differences may support E. Erikson's theory that stage crisis resolution is universal, and that despite the different conditions before and after World War II, both groups adapted and resolved their stage crises in the range of the normed population. POI findings suggest that the middle-aged group was more inner-directed, or self-actualized than the other group. This finding also was confounded by education. The role of education in psychosocial development and self-actualization and certain gender differences found in MPD and POI scores are areas calling for additional study. (Contains 27 references.) (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 429 100

Psychosocial Development and Self-Actualization Across Age Groups

Middle-Aged and Senior Adults Compared Developmentally

Kay Parkin
John Gaa
Paul Swank
Dov Liberman
University of Houston

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Kay Parkin
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

TM029638

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Psychosocial Development and Self-Actualization Across Age Groups

Currently, there are several cohort groups existing in American society whose childhood development occurred under vastly different social, economic, and technological circumstances. The present research sought to examine whether significant differences exist between two of these adult cohort groups in psychosocial development and self-actualization--two areas of personality development possibly affected by the different environments as well as the gender roles unique to each groups' life-span.

Mixed findings in previous research regarding adult development, the changing patterns of gender roles, and the changing culture since WWII, have raised questions concerning personality development across generations. Therefore, Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and Abraham Maslow's theory of self-actualization were the basis for exploring possible differences between a pre-World War II group, also known as senior adults, and a post-WWII group, also known as baby-boomers.

There has been relatively little research comparing these pre- and post- WWII generations with regard to *developmental* issues. The most extensive study was conducted by Mitchell (1984) in the late 70s and early 80s and utilized extensive quantitative survey techniques. He used Maslow's hierarchy of needs as the theory basis and developed typologies comprised of demographics and psychographics. He found that the baby-boomers and the older generations had different value systems, so he developed a double hierarchy which suggested that many of the younger generation are "inner-directed" as opposed to their "outer-directed" parents and grandparents. Both routes can lead to self-actualization, according to Mitchell (1984).

The primary research question examined in the present study was whether differences exist across generations, across genders, and across age by gender categories with respect to psychosocial development and self-actualization.

Methods

The 113 subjects in this study were a convenience sample from white, middle-aged and elderly middle-class adults. Volunteers from both age groups were recruited from a local Methodist Church and the surrounding neighborhood so that socioeconomic levels and other demographic characteristics would be relatively homogeneous. The elderly group consisted of 57 people (28 men, 29 women) and the post-WWII middle-aged group was comprised of 56 middle-aged people (28 men, 28 women). Most subjects were recruited by an announcement in various settings such as Sunday school classrooms or club meetings at the local Methodist Church. Phone

numbers from the surrounding neighborhood were acquired from a neighborhood telephone directory.

The subjects were allowed to take home a research "packet" containing a letter of instruction, a letter explaining their rights, a short demographic questionnaire, and the POI and MPD measures. The elderly subjects received booklets and answer sheets with enlarged text to avoid any misunderstandings that could occur because of failing eyesight. The data collection took about 2 1/2 months.

The measure of psychosocial development (MPD) according to the author, Hawley (1988), is "a self-report inventory, based on Eriksonian constructs, which assesses adolescent and adult personality development." The MPD was employed as an index of overall psychosocial health and it measures the eight positive and eight negative stage attitudes, and estimates the degree of resolution for the stage conflicts.

The Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) was created by Shostrom in 1966 with the help of Maslow and other researchers to fill a need for, "a comprehensive measure of values and behavior seen to be of importance in the development of the self-actualizing person."

An ANOVA procedure was conducted on the MPD and the POI scores. Age was the primary independent variable, but gender was also tested with the POI and the MPD scores being the dependent variables. Thus, it was a 2x2 factorial design with gender and age category being the classification variables.

Results

The demographic data indicated that the subjects were highly educated, mostly white, and all professional or white collar workers (based on job title before retirement for the older group). Over half (67.9%) of the middle-aged group and over a fourth (26.5%) of the older group had household income levels of $75,000 and above per year. The mean age for the baby-boomers was about 43 and for the older adults, about age 74.

MPD

There are eight positive and eight negative subscales in the MPD, corresponding with Erikson's eight stages of life crises. The total overall resolution score of all eight scales was considered the main psychosocial variable in this study, but no significant differences between generations were found. Additionally, no significant differences were found among age groups on the subscales except for the resolution score of industry versus inferiority. The middle-aged group was found to be significantly higher than the older group in the resolution of this stage crisis

Since gender was considered as a possible control variable or moderating variable, differences across gender were also examined. Significant differences emerged in the resolution

scores of two subscales. Women were found to be significantly higher than men in their resolution of trust versus mistrust and in their resolution of intimacy versus isolation.

POI

The POI measures self-actualization several ways: through ratios, main scales and 10 subscales. The present study focused on the main scales of time competence and inner-direction.

The time competence mean for the older group was slightly higher than the middle-aged group (16.72 compared to 16.30) and the mean for men was slightly higher than women (16. 95 compared to 16.09). However, there were no significant differences on the scale of time competence.

Inner-directed scores did show generational differences with the middle-aged group significantly more inner-directed than the older group. Middle-aged women demonstrated the highest levels of inner-direction (mean of 84.75) followed by middle-aged men (mean of 83.11) and older men (mean of 82.11). The older women scored the lowest in inner-direction (mean of 77.97). According to Shostrom (1966), the self-actualizing means for the inner-directed scale range between about 87 to 100.

Post Hoc

A post hoc Pearson correlational coefficient analysis was used to examine the possible relation of education and income to the dependent variables because the subjects appeared to be highly educated and from affluent households. The older women were less educated than the older men and all of the middle-aged group, and the older group had lower incomes than the middle-aged group. Because education was found to be related to several variable subscales, another ANOVA was conducted controlling for education.

When education was controlled for, the significant differences between the age categories disappeared. All of the significant differences between age groups in this study appear to be confounded by education.

Discussion

The results from the MPD scores found the middle-aged group to be significantly higher than the older group in the resolution of industry versus inferiority. However, this does not imply that the older group has a low resolution score and therefore leans toward inferiority. In fact, the mean for the older men and women (15.43 and 15.31 respectively) were well within the normed range. What this finding could suggest is that the middle-aged group, particularly the women (mean of 18.71; norm of 16.12), simply scored high in industry. Considering the highly professional levels of the middle-aged women in this study combined with their education levels (50% attended or completed graduate school) and high household income, it could be possible that this particular sample simply tapped into a population of highly industrious achievers.

However, industry versus inferiority was the only generational difference found on the MPD and it was confounded with education. Therefore, a lack of generational differences on the other subscales and on the total overall resolution score could support Erikson's theory assumption which argues that stage crises resolution is universal. In other words, despite the different social, technological, and economic worlds of pre- and post-WWII, this sample population adapted and generally resolved their stage crises within the range of the normed population.

The findings with the POI suggests the sample middle-aged group was generally more inner-directed, or self-actualized than the older group, which could support Mitchell's (1984) findings as discussed above (although again, this was confounded by education).

The significant findings of gender differences on two subscales on the MPD brings up an entirely different set of issues. The findings suggest that women from both age groups have a higher resolution of trust versus mistrust, and a higher resolution of intimacy versus isolation than men from both age groups. In addressing the gender issues, the norms of the MPD should be considered. The significant differences stem from the slightly higher than the norm mean scores of the women from both age groups, and the lower than the norm mean scores of the men from both age groups, particularly the middle-aged men. A cause for these lower scores of the middle-aged men from this sample cannot be established from this study. Further research may need to be conducted to explore why this occurred.

Questions are raised by this study that cannot be easily answered. For example, do inner-directed people pursue higher education, or does higher education encourage inner-direction? Additionally, does education help people better resolve the industry versus inferiority crisis, or do people who have better resolved the industry versus inferiority crisis pursue higher education? If developmental questions like these can be answered through more exploration, it may help psychologists working with aging populations understand more about the values important to various cohort groups, and understand developmental differences that may exist.

References

Baltes, P.B. (1979). Life-span developmental psychology: Some converging observations on history and theory, Life-Span Development and Behavior (Vol. 2), P.B. Baltes & O.G. Brim (eds.), New York: Academic Press.

Blair, A.K. (1996). Why women are breaking through glass ceiling, Houston Chronicle. July 18, p. 15A.

Bram, L.L. (ed.) (1983). Education of women. Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia. Vol. 9, p. 68. Funk & Wagnalls: NY.

Cacciaguerra, F. (1989). Subjective needs of elderly country people, Brain Dysfunction, 2:131-145.

Dychtwald, K., & Flower, J. (1990) Age wave: The challenges and opportunities of an aging America. New York: Bantam Books.

Erikson, E.H. (1968). Identity: Youth and Crisis. New York: Norton.

Felton, B.J. (1987). Cohort Variation in happiness: Some hypotheses and exploratory analyses. International Journal of Aging and Human Development, 25(1), 27-42.

Fox, J., R.R. Knapp & W.B. Michael. (1968). Assessment of self-actualization of psychiatric patients: Validity of the Personal Orientation Inventory. Educational and Psychological Measurement, 28, 565-569.

Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice: Women's conception of self and morality. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Guttentag, M., & Secord, P.F. (1982). Too many women: The sex ratio question. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Hawley, G.A. (1980). Measures of Psychosocial Development: Professional Manual. Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.: Odessa, Florida.

Helson, R. & B.W. Roberts. (1994). Ego development and personality change in adulthood. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 66 (5): 911-920.

Holman, R.H. (1984) A Values and Lifestyle Perspective on Human Behavior, ch. 3. Pitts, R.E. Jr. & Woodside, A.G., eds. Personal Values and Consumer Psychology. Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books.

Horst, E.A. (1995). Reexamining gender issues in Erikson's stages of identity and intimacy. Journal of Counseling & Development, Jan./Feb., Vol. 73, p. 271-278.

Hooyman, N.R., & H.A. Kiyak. (1996). Social Gerontology: A Multidisciplinary Perspective, Fourth Edition. Allyn & Bacon; Needham Heights, MA.

Jennings, A.G. (1995). Ego development in sexually abused women. Unpublished paper, University of Houston.

Kausler, D.H. (1994). Learning and Memory in Normal Aging. New York: Academic Press.

Loevinger, J. (1976). Ego development: Conceptions and theories. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Loevinger, J. et.al. (1985). Ego development in college. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 48 (4):947-962.

Maslow, A.H. (1987). Motivation and Personality. New York: Harper & Row.

McBride, M.C. (1990). Autonomy and the struggle for female identity: Implications for counseling women. Journal of Counseling & Development, Sept./Oct., Vol. 69, p. 22-26.

Mitchell, A. (1984). The Nine American Lifestyles. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

Thomas, R.M. (1992). Comparing Theories of Child Development. 3rd Ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.

Triandis, H.C. (1994). Culture and Social Behavior. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Shostrom, E.L. (1966). Personal Orientation Inventory Manual: An Inventory for the Measurement of Self-Actualization. San Diego, CA: EdITS.

Weir, W.R. & E.M. Gade. (1969). An approach to counseling alcoholics. Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin, 12, 227-230.

Zaccaria, J.S. & W.R. Weir. (1967). A comparison of alcoholics and selected samples of nonalcoholics in terms of a positive concept of mental health. Journal of Social Psychology, 71, 151-157.